

To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

# The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

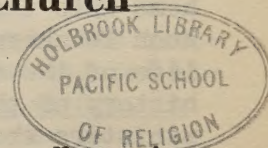
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## Providing Responsible Leadership in the Rural Church\*

By Edward Mott



Today as never before, America needs responsible leadership. Her unique place in the world makes it so. Certainly the conditions within her boundary make it so. For example, Mrs. Paul Whitney, Guidance Director of the Eastwood High School of Syracuse, recently pointed out that we are the most crime laden country in the world. Nearly  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million major crimes were committed last year and over 4 million lesser crimes.

In a recent issue of the Reader's Digest, an article entitled "It Could Happen Here" by Malcolm W. Bingby, contained the following statements:

"The story of the rise of Nazism in Germany is the story of a people who lost their moral sense in seeking security. It is the story of the world today.....It is going to take more than pious platitudes to save us. There must be a rebirth of conscience, a realization that real success cannot be determined by the Social Register. The rebirth must come from the mind and the heart and the soul of the individual American citizen."

The rural church should do her part in bringing about this "rebirth of mind and heart and soul." If she does her part, responsible leadership must certainly be developed. When I purchased a fishing license recently, I received a little booklet along with it. Upon opening it, I found a message from the Governor. One of the first statements was that in order to have a good fishing program in New York State, we need good leadership. After I had fished unsuccessfully over in Cayuga Lake awhile, I fully understood what he meant. I think we are aware of the lack of leadership in our rural churches and of the need for doing something about it. I am not an expert in this field even if you accept the definition that "the expert is a little man, away from home with a brief case." But from observation and experience, I have developed some very definite convictions. May I mention several.

### LAY IT TO HEART

First, if we are going to develop responsible leadership, we must "lay it to heart." I was very much interested in a quotation from Jeremiah. "They

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have made it (the land) a desolation; it mourneth unto me, being desolate, the whole land is made desolate, because no man layeth it to heart." What Jeremiah said of the land is true of our Sunday Schools and churches. Too many rural people are forgetting the "seek ye first the kingdom" principle and are making it "seek ye first to get your work done and let the church have what is left." Many who still contribute generously of their money have forgotten that there is importance in giving of service and of receiving blessings from worship. We must in some way convince people of these things.

One of the best ways to convince others is to believe in them yourself. Do you believe in the possibilities of service to the rural church and in the importance of her people enough to go to a community and build yourself and your home into the life of such a community? We need such ministers. We need also such teachers, business men and homemakers, who will build their lives into the life of the community. At our church recently we had an Old Home Sunday. In the history of the two churches in our Federation, we heard repeatedly of individual ministers who came to the community fresh from school, brought their young brides, stayed a short time and then went on to so-called "larger work". It is often the same in our rural schools. Recently, a principal said, "We offer a two year training period for young teachers." Perhaps we gain something from the fresh, enthusiastic outlook of these people, but rural communities need greatly the benefit of these people as they mature. The recent history of some developing churches shows what such ministers and others can do. We need ministers who believe that rural people are important and who will lay the work of the rural church to heart enough to become a part of us and to pioneer in the developing of Christian rural communities.

I realize many of the difficulties confronting a minister who will take this attitude. It has not been scientifically proven, but I believe that in many cases communities will respond to such treatment and give the ministers fine support. In this regard, I believe that laymen should take more leadership into their own hands than they usually have. I was proud of our church, when between pastors, it modernized the parsonage and entirely paid for it. We have taken advantage of a pastor's vacation to meet and raise his salary and to settle a problem regarding the use of our church buildings. Such problems often cause embarrassment to preachers. Laymen should be brought to more definitely feel their responsibility in these things and to leave the minister's energy free for other tasks. There are many other issues which laymen should "lay to heart".

Mr. Wm. Danforth, President of Purina Mills, told some of us about a visit which Kagawa made to his home when he was in this country before the war. Kagawa, you may remember, wore the type of suit which the Japanese laborer could afford. Kagawa could not see well. The combination of cheap suit and poor eyesight made the suit he was wearing look badly. Mr. Danforth wished to do something for him. He asked Kagawa's traveling companion to approach him on the idea of a new suit. He brought back word that Kagawa said to thank him but that he had a suit that would do. But back home, there was a village that needed a new church. He got the church. His church was nearer his heart than his clothes. What is nearest yours and mine?

## PEOPLE ARE OUR BUSINESS

My second conviction is that people are our business. Plans and programs are important, but if they do not develop Christian personality, they are nothing. Too many people are becoming self-centered. You will only have to listen to a few conversations to find out how wrapped up people are in their own



affairs. I have ridden on trains and buses and have had what to me were very interesting conversations. That is, when we were through talking, I had added much to my store of knowledge concerning people and their work without their ever asking me as much as my name or business. It made no difference to me, but illustrates what I mean. Rural people suffer from this "selfitis" as much as anyone. Have you asked someone to take a church job recently and received the reply, "Oh, I'm too busy"? Was he busy with anything more than his own interests? Did he do anything in the church or community? Probably not, unless he was one of the few who do readily assume responsibility and are so overworked that religious work becomes a burden instead of a joy; whereas, if each individual did his share, all would profit.

What can we of the church do about this? We can each cultivate the quality of really being interested in every person in our community. A few regular attendants must not monopolize the church. We must work to get everyone within the church area into the habit of saying "our church". There is a job in the church for every person. As soon as he gets the attitude that it is his church as well as his neighbor's, the sooner we can get him to do something. A person with wide experience with young people all over the world, says that young people of high school age want hard things to do. I have often seen that proven. Last year during the United War Fund Drive in our town, our most enthusiastic and energetic solicitor was a girl just out of high school. No one before had thought that any of the young people were responsible enough to do such a job. If we want young people and even children to be responsible, we must give them responsibility. We must believe in them and work with them if we keep them in the rural church.

A rural Christian home is one of the best places for nourishing responsible leadership. Here it can be shown that it takes careful consistent work to develop anything worth while. No good dairyman milks his cows just whenever he feels like it. Anything you undertake in the church needs the same regular attention. A good farmer carefully selects and plants his seed. So should a good Sunday School teacher. In fact the rural home, church, school and community should form a victorious circle each helping the other to develop Christian personality. Whatever the rural church can do to help to put Christlike living in practice in any of these fields will return leadership dividends to the church. If you want Christian homes to develop Sunday School leadership, plan your Sunday School work to develop the Christian Home. Challenge everyone in the home. A strong adult Bible Class may contribute more to the Christian education of the Primary child than a strong Primary class. Do not neglect anyone from the baby to Grandpa.

Be interested enough in people to see what they may become, as well as what they are. Maybe you do not have someone in your community to whom you can now say, "We need you to teach this Sunday School class. You have all the qualifications. You live your religion, you are energetic, this group of boys likes you." But maybe there is someone to whom you can say some of these things and lead him to grow into the others.

#### APPLY VISION TO TECHNIQUES

My third conviction is that we must apply some vim and vision to our techniques. In agriculture, we must still plan and plant, weed and cultivate, and harvest and market. But we are constantly developing new ways of doing these things. If, in this tractor age, I were still teaching horse-agriculture only, my job would soon be over. We have had leadership training in some of our rural



churches, but I would guess that in 85% of the classes we are still using the old "Who was Jacob? How many sons did he have?" technique. We need to study the content of the Bible, but we should study new techniques of teaching such as those being used in the day school and even develop new ones.

In schools now there is much stress upon visual education -- charts, slides, filmstrips and movies. These aids are being developed for church and Sunday School use. We should take advantage of them and develop our own. Since I wrote this the first time, I saw in the Post Standard a report that the First Presbyterian Church in Auburn is using these visual aids once a month in each of the departments of its Sunday School. If money is a stumbling-block here, perhaps something in the way of cooperation between city and country church, school and church or several rural churches might work. You might be surprised at the enthusiasm with which your young people might go to work to raise the money for a movie projector for use in your church. The church with foresight and which places mature and intelligent demands before its people will seldom be disappointed. Let the church take courage!

We need new techniques for reaching people. If they will not come to the church, we must reach them where they are. Perhaps you have heard of the Fireside Gatherings, where sometimes as many as fifty people will meet for worship and fellowship when there would not have been five if the traditional prayer meeting had been announced. I believe that the week-day religious program in our school can be made even more effective than it is in reaching pupils who have no other church contact. I believe that more schools need this or similar programs, such as "Religious Emphasis Week".

We must find new techniques for teaching the application of the eternal truths of the Bible to our modern living in the country. Some of us could well be pioneers in such plans to make religion practical as that developed in Cumberland County, Tennessee, where a young pastor developed funds to help aid Christian young people in getting a start on the land. That is one of the problems in which I am very much interested. In many places service organizations like Rotary help boys to start farm projects. Why should our church lag behind? Wouldn't that be a good way to show some young man that his church is interested in him?

A Scotchman and an Englishman were shipwrecked. At the end of the second week, they were in desperate need of clothes and water. The Englishman moaned, "It just couldn't be worse." "Oh, but it could," replied the Scotchman, "I might have bought a return ticket." To provide responsible leadership, our rural church today does not need a return ticket, but a new application of practical religion in every life it touches. The message of the Bible is as modern as tomorrow's sunrise. The redemptive influence of the church must be felt in all areas of our life, in the home, in the community, and from these, through Christian leaders into national and world relationships. There is no road back to yesterday. The rural church today must have qualified leaders. It must also train leaders for tomorrow's world. To do our part, I urge that we remember to lay it to heart, make people our business and apply a lot of vim and vision to our techniques.